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NO. (1)

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1998

IN RE

MEDICAL REVIEW PANEL

FOR

THE CLAIM OF CLARENCE BROWN

AND

GAIL O'CONNOR BROWN, *Petitioners*

On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

I. Whether Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628, as it applies to children who, by the nature of the medical malpractice they have suffered cannot detect their injuries for more then three years, denies such persons the due process of the law, when it denies these persons meaningful access to the court, in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

II. Whether Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628, as it applies to children who, by the nature of the medical malpractice they have suffered, cannot detect their injuries for more then three years, discriminates against such persons, based on age and physical condition and denies such persons the equal protection of the law, when it denies such persons meaningful access to the courts, in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDINGS BELOW

Petitioners herein, Clarence Brown and Gail O'Connor Brown, in their own right and on behalf of their minor child, Crystal Brown, were claimants/plaintiffs in the Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans, regarding a claim before a state medical review panel.

Defendants in those proceedings were Dr. Winston Murry, M.D. and the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans. The Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans is operated by the State of Louisiana.

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ON PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

Clarence Brown and Gail O'Connor Brown, in their own right and on behalf of their minor child, Crystal Brown, petition for a writ of certiorari to review the ruling of the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana.

OPINIONS BELOW

The ruling of the Louisiana Supreme Court appears at Appendix A, to the petition, and is unpublished. *In re Medical Review Panel for the claim of Brown,* No. 98-C-2020 (La. November 6, 1998).

The opinion of the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal appears at Appendix B, to the petition, and is reported at *In re Medical Review Panel for the claim of Brown,* 715 So.2d 1249 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1998).

The ruling of the Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans appears at Appendix C, to the petition, and is

unpublished. *Brown, et al. v. Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans et al.*, No. 95-13006, (CDC June 23, 1997).

JURISDICTION

An opinion, issued by the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal, dismissing the petitioners' claims, was entered on July 7, 1998. A copy of that opinion appears at Appendix B. A petition for writ of certiorari to the Louisiana Supreme Court, raising federal constitutional issues, was filed on July 28, 1998. A copy of that petition appears at Appendix D. A judgment denying the petition for writ of certiorari was entered, by the Louisiana Supreme Court, on November 6, 1998. A copy of that ruling appears at Appendix A. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a).

The constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 is being drawn into question; therefore, 28 U.S.C. § 2403(b) may apply. This petition for writ of certiorari has been served on the The Honorable Richard P. Ieyoub, Louisiana Attorney General.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The protection provided to all, under the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.

> All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction, thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the

> privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. U.S. Const. Amend. XIV, § 1, cl. 3, cl. 4.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Crystal Brown was born on January 2nd, 1984. On or about July 10th, 1985, she was malpracticed upon by physicians employed, or controlled, by the State of Louisiana; when they negligently performed a "breast biopsy", which removed all of the breast tissue in her right breast.

This was undiscoverable by Crystal, or her parents, until years later when she reached puberty. When her breasts did not develop equally, she saw a physician at the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans' Clinic. On February 3rd, 1994, Crystal and her parents were told that Crystal would have no breast development because of the surgical removal of her right breast tissue.

Pursuant to the Louisiana Medical Malpractice Act, Louisiana Revised Statute 40:1299.39, *et seq.*, La Rev. Stat. Ann. § 40.1200.39 *et seq.* (West Sup. 1999), Crystal's parents filed a Complaint with the Division of Administration on May 6th, 1994. The State of Louisiana did not dispute that the Complaint was filed within one year of the discovery of the malpractice.

The State of Louisiana filed an Exception of Prescription on April 4th, 1996. The Browns, in their Supplemental Motion in Opposition to the Exception of Prescription, challenged the

constitutionality of the statute setting the prescriptive period for medical malpractice, Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628[1], La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 9:5628 (West Sup. 1999), under Article 1 section 3 of the Louisiana Constitution, La. Const. Art. 1 § 3, (West 1996). The trial court granted the exception of prescription and dismissed the case on June 20th, 1997, without ordering a hearing, to allow the parties to present evidence regarding the reasonableness of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628, as required by *Sibley v. Bd. of Suprs. of L.S.U.*, 477 So.2d 1094 (La. 1985).

Crystal's appeal, which was timely filed on the issues of her right to a *Sibley* hearing relative to the constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628 or the interruption of prescription due to continuous treatment, argued that the statute discriminated against her on the basis of her physical condition that could not be discovered for well over three years, *i*.e., until she reached puberty. The Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal held in their opinion, rendered on July 7, 1998, that Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628 did not violate the Louisiana

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[1] Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5625 provides:

A. No action for damages for injury or death against any physician, chiropractor, nurse, licensed midwife practitioner, dentist, psychologist, optometrist, hospital duly licensed under the laws of this state, or community blood center or tissue bank as defined in R.S. 40:1299.41(A), whether based upon tort, or breach of contract, or otherwise, arising out of patient care shall be brought unless filed within one year from the date of the alleged act, omission, or neglect, or within one year from the date of discovery of the alleged act, omission, or neglect; however, even as to claims filed within one year from the date of such discovery, in all events such claims shall be filed at the latest within a period of three years from the date of the alleged act, omission, or neglect.

B. The provisions of this Section shall apply to all persons whether or not infirm or under disability of any kind and including minors and interdicts. La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 9:5628 (West Sup. 1999).

Constitution. *In re Medical Review Panel for claim of Brown*, 715 So.2d 1249 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1998).

A Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Louisiana Supreme Court was filed on July 28, 1998. The Browns, in their Assignments of Errors, made the following challenge to Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5628 under the United States Constitution:

> The Honorable Trial Court and Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal erred when they failed to order a *Sibley* hearing assigning to the State the burden of showing that LSA-R.S. 9:5628 is not arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable or reasonably furthers a legitimate purpose once the constitutionality of the statute was challenged. Crystal Brown is unfairly discriminated against in violation of the Louisiana Constitution, Art. 1, Section 3 and the United States Constitution on the basis of her physical condition and sex, which discrimination was undiscoverable by her until years after the malpractice and years after prescription had tolled under LSA-R.S. 9:5628.

(See, Appendix D, Pgs. 8-9, last paragraph pg. 8, beginning paragraph pg. 9.) The Louisiana Supreme Court denied the petition, without reasons, on November 6, 1998.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

Crystal Brown respectfully requests that this Court grant the petition for a writ of certiorari to review the ruling of the Louisiana Supreme Court regarding the federal constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 for the following reasons:

1) The Louisiana Supreme Court's ruling denied Crystal Brown a contradictory hearing and the opportunity to provide evidence and testimony to support her claims that Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, as applied, violates her federal rights of equal protection and due process;

2) Louisiana Revised Statute 9:2568 violates, not only Crystal Browns federal rights to due process and equal protection, but also the rights of all persons in Louisiana whose medical malpractice injuries cannot be detected within the statute's three year prescriptive period;

3) Louisiana Revised Statute 9:2568 has a disproportional impact on minors, who are disenfranchised from both the judicial and political processes, and are greatly restricted in there ability to effectively protect their federal constitutional rights;

4) The sole remedy sought by Crystal Brown, from this Court, is that her case be remanded to the Louisiana trial court so that she may present evidence to support her federal constitutional claims.

ARGUMENT

I. Crystal Brown is properly before this Court because Louisiana procedural jurisprudence prohibits Crystal Brown from raising her federal constitutional claims at the trial court level.

Louisiana procedural jurisprudence effectively denies Crystal Brown of an opportunity to raise her federal constitutional issues before a trial court. The purposes behind these procedural requirements serves no legitimate purpose when they effectively close trial court doors to federal constitutional claims. This Court should, therefore, review the federal constitutional issues Crystal Brown raised in her petition for certiorari to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

This Honorable Court set out the minimal requirements for presenting federal claims in State Courts so as to preserve them for review by this Court in *Webb v. Webb,* 451 U.S. 493 (1981). Under the ruling of *Webb*:

> [a]t the minimum . . . there should be no doubt from the record that a claim under a federal statute or the Federal Constitution was presented in the state courts and that those courts were appraised of the nature or substance of the federal claim at the time and in the manner required by state law.

Id. at 501. In *Henry v. Mississippi,* 379 U.S. 443 (1965), this Court, also, held that:

> ...litigant's procedural defaults in state proceedings do not prevent vindication of his federal rights unless the State's insistence on compliance with its procedural rule serves a legitimate state interest. In every case we must inquire whether the enforcement of a procedural forfeiture serves such a state interest. If it does not, the state procedural rule ought not be permitted to bar vindication of important federal rights.

Id. at 447 - 448. Like the defendant in *Henry*, Crystal Brown made a procedural default by failing to raise her federal constitutional claims before the trial court. However, as outlined below, Louisiana procedural jurisprudence denies Crystal Brown of any opportunity to raise her federal constitutional claim before the trial court.[2]

The Louisiana Supreme Court set the procedural requirements for challenging the constitutionality of state statutes in *Vallo v. Gayle Oil Co.*, 646 So.2d 859 (La. 1994). Under the ruling of *Vallo,* a party must specifically plead the unconstitutionality of the statute and particularize the grounds for the challenge in either a petition, an exception, a written motion, or an answer. *Id.* at 865. If this procedure is not followed, the right to challenge the constitutionality of the statute on appeal is lost. *Id.* at 864-65.[3]

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[2] Crystal Brown did argue that Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 violated her right to equal protection under the Louisiana Constitution, La. Const. Art. 1§ 3, at the trial court, in her supplemental memorandum in opposition to the exception to prescription. Although, this was an inappropriate mechanism for raising these constitutional issues, it was the only mechanism available. She also raised these state constitutional issues on appeal to the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal, which held that Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, as applied, did not violate the Louisiana Constitution. *In re Medical Review Panel for claim of Brown,* 715 So.2d 1249, 1252-1253 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1998).

[3] *Citing, Louisiana ex rel. McAvoy v. Louisiana State Bd. Of Medical Examiners,* 115 So.2d 833,836 (La. 1959); *Johnson v. Welsh,* 334 So.2d 395, 396-97 (La. 1976); *Becker v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 307 So.2d 101, 103 (La. 1975); *Summerell v. Phillips,* 247 So.2d 542, 546 (La. 1971); *State v. de St. Romes,* 26 La.Ann. 753, 754 (1874), *on rehr'g; De Blanc v. De Blanc,* 18 So.2d 619, 623 (La.App.Orleans, 1944).

Crystal Brown, however, could not raise her federal constitutional claims by any mechanism specified in *Vallo.* She is prohibited by the Louisiana Medical Malpractice Act, La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 40:1299.39 *et seq.* (West Sup. 1999), from filing a petition prior to her claims being reviewed by a state medical review panel. Louisiana Revised Statute 40:1299.39.1 B(1)(a)(i) provides:

> [n]o action against the state, its agencies, or a person covered by this Part, or his insurer, may be commenced in any court before the claimant's complaint has been presented to a state medical review panel established pursuant to this Section.

La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 40:1299.39.1 B(1)(a)(i) (West Sup. 1999). A suit, which is filed prior to review by the state medical review panel, will be dismissed as premature. *Fitzgerald v. Hurwitz*, 517 So.2d 412 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1987); *Benedict v. Kearby,* 537 So.2d 870 (La.App. 5 Cir. 1989); *Lewis v. Crossman*, 582 So.2d 991 (La.App. 1 Cir. 1991).

However, the Louisiana Medical Malpractice Act allows claims which have prescribed to be dismissed prior to completion of the state medical review panel proceedings. Louisiana Revised Statute 40:1299.39.1 B(2)(a) provides:

> [t]he state or a person, against whom a claim has been filed under the provisions of this Part, may raise any exceptions or defenses available pursuant to R.S. 9:5628 in a court of competent jurisdiction and proper venue at any time without need for completion of the review process by the state medical review panel.

La. Rev. State. Ann. § 40:1299.39.1 B(2)(a) (West Supp. 1999).

Plaintiffs, such as Crystal Brown, therefore, cannot raise the unconstitutionality of Louisiana's medical malpractice prescription statute, La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 9:5628 (West Sup. 1999), in the mechanisms set out in *Vallo*. The medical malpractice victim is relegated to raising the issue in a memorandum filed in the trial court or during the appeal process. Both of these mechanisms have been attempted, and the courts of Louisiana have consistently declined to address the constitutional issues because they were not properly raised. *Williams v. State, Dept. of Heath & Hospitals,* 703 So.2d 579 (La. 1997); *Descant v. Adm'rs of Tulane Educ. Fund,* 706 So.2d 618 (La.App. 4 Cir.), *writ denied,* 717 So.2d 1131 (La. 1998); *Romaguera v. Overby,* 709 So.2d 266 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1998); *Rey v. St. Paul Fire and Marine Ins. Co.,* 665 So.2d 109 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1995), *writ denied,* 669 So.2d 1223 (La. 1996); *Levron v. State, Dept. of Health & Hospitals,* 673 So.2d 279 (La.App. 4 Cir), *writ denied,* 679 So.2d 1391 (La. 1996).

Crystal Brown's claims were dismissed by the trial court on the defendants' exception of prescription. Crystal Brown, therefore, was never able to properly raise her federal constitutional claims as required by *Vallo*. Crystal Brown did, however, raise her claims specifically and with particularity in her petition for writ of certiorari to the Louisiana Supreme Court, in partial compliance with the rulings of both *Vallo* and *Webb*. (See, Appendix D, pgs. 8-9.) While, this was not the proper mechanism for her to use, it was the only avenue available for her to raise her federal constitutional issues.

Louisiana's procedural requirements effectively deny Crystal Brown, and those similarly situated, of any mechanism by which they can raise and vindicate their federal rights. The

Vallo court gave the following reasoning to support its procedural requirements:

> The requirement of specially pleading the unconstitutionality of a statue in pleadings implies that this notable issue will receive a contradictory hearing, wherein all parties will be afforded the opportunity to brief and argue the issue. The record of the proceeding could then be reviewed to determine whether the party attacking the statute sustained his or her burden of proof, and whether the trial court attempted to construe the statute so as to preserve its constitutionality.

Vallo, 646 So.2d 865(citations omitted). These requirements, while serving a legitimate purpose, are based on an assumption that a party will have the ability to raise the federal constitutional issue at the trial court level. However, these requirements serve no such purpose when they are used to effectively prohibit a party from raising federal constitutional issues. This Honorable Court, in accordance with the ruling of *Henry*, should grant Crystal Brown's petition for writ of certiorari so that her federal issues can be heard and her federal rights vindicated.

II. Crystal Brown should be granted a writ of certiorari because Louisiana Revised Statue 9:5268 violates the equal protection and due process rights of all present and potential victims of medical malpractice, whose injuries cannot be detected within three years.

Louisiana's medical malpractice prescription statute, not only adversely affects Crystal Brown but, also, adversely affects all persons whose injuries cannot be detected within a

three year period. The issues raised by Crystal Brown, therefore, extend far beyond the confines of her case and, thus, require review by this Court.

As irrefutably established at trial and cited, with approval, by the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal in *Whitnell v. Silverman,* 646 So.2d 989, 992-993 (La.App. 4 Cir. 1994), *rev'd on other grounds,* 686 So.2d 23 (La. 1996), hereinafter referred to as *Whitnell I,* there are nineteen diseases which cannot be discovered within the three year prescriptive period, including:

1. Carcinoma of the cervix - in situ - pap smear;
2. Mammographic evidence of breast carcinoma - non-palpable;
3. Familial hypolipidemia;
4. Asymptomatic coronary atherosclerosis;
5. Early stage multiple myeloma;
6. Von Willbrand's disease;
7. Leukoplakia;
8. Colon polyps;
9. Malignant melanoma behind ear;
10. Aneurysm - thoracic aorta - cerebral artery;
11. Early stage ovarian carcinoma;
12. Chronic active hepatitis;
13. First degree heart block;
14. Second degree heart block;
15. Petit mal seizures;
16. Congenital absence of the spleen;
17. Pernicious anemia;
18. Gout;
19. Blood transfusion acquired AIDS.

The Louisiana Fourth Circuit initially held that the prescriptive period violated the equal protection guarantees of the Louisiana Constitution, La. Const. Art. 1 § 3 (West 1996), as it applied to these conditions. *Id.* at 993. However, the Louisiana Supreme Court held that the plaintiff, in *Whitnell,* did not have standing to raise the issue of constitutionality, as it applies to the above listed conditions, and left the issue open for future consideration. *Whitnell v. Silverman,* 686 So.2d 23, 29 (La. 1996), hereinafter referred to as *Whitnell II.*

The significance, of the issues raised by Crystal Brown, beyond the instant case can be readily seen by reviewing the number of cases of AIDS and HIV infections in Louisiana and the United States. The Center for Disease Control's AIDS Public Information Data Set, indicates that 9,126 persons in Louisiana were infected with the AIDS virus in 1996. Two hundred of the infected persons were under the age of nineteen. Twenty four of these children contracted the virus through the use of contaminated blood products; eight via a blood transfusion and sixteen through the use of blood products to treat hemophilia or other coagulation disorders. Of the 8,926 adults infected with AIDS in Louisiana, 272 were exposed to the virus through contaminate blood products; 200 contracted the virus via a blood transfusion and 72 through the use of blood products to treat hemophilia or other coagulation disorders. See HIV InSite at http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/cgi-msql/usa_db3.pl. The Center for Disease Control statistics for the entire United States indicate that of the 581,429 cases of AIDS, reported in 1996, 10,383 where in children under the age of nineteen with 520 of those children being infected through blood or tissue transfusions and 944 during the treatment of coagulation disorders. Of the 571,046 adults infected with AIDS in the United States, 11,470 were exposed to the virus through contaminated blood or tissue products; 7,741 via blood/tissue

transfusions and 3,729 via use of blood products to control coagulation disorders. See, HIV InSite at http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/cgi-msqlusa_db3.pl.

AIDS is a matter of national concern. Louisiana Revised Statue 9:5268 adversely affects not only those persons with AIDS in Louisiana but those throughout the country who may move to Louisiana. The statute's effect on adults and children with AIDS, and the other nineteen diseases listed in *Whitnell I,* indicates that the issues raised by the petitioners go far beyond the case of Crystal Brown. This Honorable Court should, therefore, grant the writ of certiorari to review the constitutional issues raised by Crystal Brown.

III. Crystal Brown should be granted a writ of certiorari because Louisiana Revised Statue 9:5268 adversely affects children who are disenfranchised from both the judicial and political processes.

Minors in Louisiana are prohibited from filing suits in their own right; therefore, Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 disproportionately effects all minors whose medical malpractice injuries occur prior to their fifteenth birthday. Furthermore, minors, without the right to vote, have no effective means to change the provisions of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 through the political process. This Court should review the constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, to ensure that the constitutional rights of minors, disenfranchised from both the judicial and political processes, are vindicated.

As pointed out by the Supreme Court of Missouri in *Strahler v. St. Luke's Hospital,* 706 S.W. 2d 7, 12 (Mo. 1986)(a case involving the medical malpractice statutes of limitation), "[o]ur society takes great pride in the fact that the law remains

forever at the ready to 'jealously guard' the rights of minors." Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 disproportionately affects children who, in Louisiana, do not have the capacity to bring suits in their own right. La. Code Civ. Proc. Ann. art. 683 (West Sup. 1999).[4] The child victims of medical malpractice must, therefore, depend on others to raise their claims which arise from conditions that neither they, nor their lay parents, can timely detect. Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, as it applies to children such as Crystal Brown, therefore, requires review by this Honorable Court.

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[4] Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure Article 683 provides:

A. An unemancipated minor does not have the procedural capacity to sue.

B. Except as otherwise provided in Article 4431, the tutor appointed by a court of this state is the proper plaintiff to sue to enforce a right of an unemancipated minor, when one or both of the parents are dead, the parents are divorced or judicially separated, or the minor is an illegitimate child.

C. The father, as administrator of the estate of his minor child, is the proper plaintiff to sue to enforce a right of an unemancipated minor who is the legitimate issue of living parents who are not divorced or judicially separated. The mother, as the administratrix of the estate of her minor child, is the proper plaintiff in such an action, when the father is mentally incompetent, committed, interdicted, imprisoned, or an absentee. Moreover, with permission of the judge, the mother may represent the minor whenever the father fails or refuses to do so; and in any event she may represent the minor under the conditions of the laws on the voluntary management of another's affairs.

D. Notwithstanding the provisions of Paragraph A, B, or C, an attorney appointed by the court having jurisdiction over an unemancipated minor who is in the legal custody of the Department of Social Services is the proper plaintiff to sue to enforce a right of an unemancipated minor. Upon application of the tutor or parent who would otherwise be the proper plaintiff to sue pursuant to Paragraph B or C, the court shall appoint or substitute as the proper plaintiff the best qualified among the tutor, parent, or appointed attorney. La. Code Civ. Proc. Ann. art. 683 (West Sup. 1999).

The Supreme Court of Ohio, in *Mominee v. Scherbarth*, 503 N.E. 2d 717 (Ohio 1986)(case ruling that the medical malpractice statute of limitation, as it applied to children, violated the Ohio Constitution), pointed out the hurdles to be crossed by a child who is a victim of malpractice:

> First, because of the inability of many children to recognize or articulate physical problems, parents may be unaware that medical malpractice has occurred. Second, the parents themselves may be minors, ignorant, lethargic, or lack the requisite concern to bring a malpractice action. See, *Sax v. Votteler*, 648 S.W. 2d 661, 667 (Tex. 1983), Third, there may effectively be no parent or guardian, concerned or otherwise, in the minor's life. For example, children in institutions, foster homes, and wards of court or others are provided no safe guards, nor do such minors have the requisite ability to seek redress or to protect personal interests.

Mominee, 503 N.E. 2d 721-722; *accord, Strahler*, 706 S.W. 2d 7; *Barrio v. San Manuel Division Hospital*, 692 P. 2d 280 (Ariz. 1984).

Other states, which have addressed the issue of constitutionality of medical malpractice statutes of limitations as they apply to children, have determined the limitations placed on the ability of minors to detect and file actions for their medical malpractice injuries warranted the protection from harsh constraints of these states medical malpractice statutes of limitations. In, *Mominee*, 503 N.E. 2d 717, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that the medical malpractice statute of limitation, as applied to minors, violated the due process clause of the state constitution. The Supreme Court of Arizona held in, *Barrio v.*

San Manuel Division Hospital, 692 P. 2d 280 (Ariz. 1984), that the medical malpractice act, as it applied to minors, violated their fundamental right to bring a tort action as guaranteed by the state constitution. In *Sax v. Votteler*, 648 S.W. 2d 611 (Tex. 1983), the Supreme Court of Texas determined that the medical malpractice statute of limitations, as it applied to minors, violated the due process provisions of the Texas Constitution because the statue "abolishes a minor's right to bring a well-established common law cause of action without providing a reasonable alternative." *Id.* at 667.

In *Carson v. Maurer*, 424 A. 2d 825 (N.H. 1980), the New Hampshire Supreme Court determined that the statute of limitation, as it applied to minors, violated the equal protection provisions of the state constitution. The court reasoned that:

> [t]he legislature may not, consistent with equal protection principles, deny only this class of medical malpractice plaintiffs the protection afforded all other persons by the saving statute.

Id. at 834.

Finally, the Supreme Court of Missouri, in *Strahler*, 706 S.W. 2d 7, held that the medical malpractice statute of limitation, as it applied to children, violated the state constitutional guarantees of open courts. The *Strahler* court stated:

> The statutory limitation period, as applied to minors, violates their right of access to our courts under Mo. Const. art. I, § 14 and renders vacant the guarantee contained in this constitutional provision which declares in no uncertain terms "that the courts of justice shall be open to every person, and certain remedy afforded for every

> injury to person. . . . " To the extent that it deprives minor medical malpractice claimants the right to assert their own claims individually, makes them dependent on the actions of others to assert their claims, and works a forfeiture of those claims if not asserted within two years, the provisions of §516.105 are too severe an interference with a minors' state constitutionally enumerated right of access to the courts to be justified by the state's interest in remedying a perceived medical malpractice crisis.

Id. at 11-12.

Minors are not only limited in their ability to raise and protect their rights in the judicial system, they are also limited in their ability to effect changes through the political process. Minors, such as Crystal Brown, do not have the right to vote. They, therefore, cannot directly lobby the legislators of Louisiana to amend Louisiana Revised Statue 9:5268 to remove the three year prescriptive period, as it applies to non detectable diseases and conditions.

While, the political process offers the more preferable mechanism for accomplishing change, this Court has recognized its role in protecting the rights of those who are unable to avail themselves of the political process. In *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez,* 411 U.S. 1 (1973), this Court held that:

> [a] suspect class entitled to the protections of strict judicial scrutiny is one "saddled with such disabilities, or subject to such a history of purposeful unequal treatment, or relegated to such a position of political powerlessness as to

> command extraordinary protection from the majoritarian political process.

Id. at 28. While children have not been saddled by a history of purposeful discrimination, they are in a position of political powerlessness. This disenfranchisement from the political process, therefore, requires their rights to be heard and defended by this Honorable Court.

Minors, who are injured by malpractice, do not have the right to file claims in their own right. They are dependent on others who, for various reasons, may fail to timely file their claims and properly raise their federal constitutional rights. Minors also lack the ability to effect changes to Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 through the political process. This Court should, therefore, grant Crystal Brown's petition for writ of certiorari to ensure that the federal rights of all minor victims of medical malpractice are properly reviewed.

IV. The history of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 and Louisiana's procedure for raising constitutional issues compel review by this Court.

The Louisiana Supreme Court has specifically left unanswered the issue of whether Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Federal Constitution. Louisiana's procedural requirements, which effectively deny Crystal Brown of the ability to raise this issue in state court, is contrary to this Court's precedent favoring the vindication of personal rights. This Court should grant Crystal Brown's petition for writ of certiorari so that her federal constitutional claims may be reviewed.

Prior to 1975, all actions, arising from medical malpractice, were governed by the one-year liberative prescription from the date that injury or damages were sustained.[5] La. Civ. Code Ann. art. 3492 and 2315 (West 1975). In 1975, the Louisiana legislature passed Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, which set the prescriptive period for medical malpractice claims at one year from the injury or discovery of the injury. However, a suit filed after discovery of the injury must be filed within three years from the occurrence of the injury.

The constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 has been reviewed on two occasions by the Louisiana Supreme Court. The first occasion was in the case of *Crier v. Whitecloud,* 496 So.2d 305 (La. 1986). The *Crier* court held that the prescriptive period did not violate the Due Process or Equal Protection clauses of either the United States or Louisiana Constitutions. However, as pointed out by Judge Waltzer, in *Whitnell* I:

> An examination of the *Crier* record indicates that it is a slim one volume with no boxes or envelopes of exhibits. A review of the record indicates that the constitutionality was not an issue raised at the trial court level, hence no evidence was introduced on that issue. Constitutionality was only raised for the first time on appeal and no evidence was entered into

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[5] Louisiana Civil Code Article 3492 deals with the liberative prescription period for delictual actions. The civil law liberative prescription is analogous to the common law statute of limitations and the civil law delictual action is analogous to the common law tort.

> the record on any appellate level. *Whitnell I*, 646 So.2d 993.

It is ironic that the *Crier* court ruled on the constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 without the issue being raised before the trial court, while the present Louisiana Supreme Court uses this requirement to deny Crystal Brown the opportunity to introduce the evidence that the *Crier* court lacked. This inconsistent application of procedural requirements is blatant evidence of the discriminatory impact of *Vallo* on all persons, such as Crystal Brown, whose claims are dismissed before they file their petition for damages.

The constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268 was raised again in *Whitnell II,* 686 So.2d 23. The Louisiana Supreme Court held, in *Whitnell II,* that the prescription statute, as it applied to patients who could discover their injuries within three years, did not violate the patients' rights to equal protection and access to the courts under the Louisiana Constitution. *Id.* at 29. However, the *Whitnell II* court specifically did not rule on the constitutionality of the statute as it applied to patients who could not discover their injuries within three years, holding that Ms. Whitnell did not have standing to raise these issues. *Id.*

Importantly, then, the only case to uphold the federal constitutionality of this biased and unfair law was decided on a deficient record. "There was not a single iota of evidence relative to the existence or non-existence of a medical malpractice crisis. In short, the *Crier* opinion is totally unsupported by its record." *Whitnell I,* 646 So.2d 993.

The issue of the constitutionality of Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268, as it applies to plaintiffs such as Crystal Brown,

therefore, remains open in the courts of Louisiana. However, the procedural requirements of *Vallo* prohibit Crystal Brown from raising these issues before a trial court. The prescription statute, in combination with the procedural requirements of *Vallo*, therefore, denies persons, such as Crystal Brown, who cannot discover their injury within the three year prescriptive period, the opportunity to redress their injuries through a court of law. (See cases cited in footnote 3.) By demanding the procedural requirements of *Vallo* be applied to plaintiffs, such as Crystal Brown, the Louisiana courts have discriminated against these plaintiffs, based on their physical condition, in violation of the Equal Protection and Due Process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. U.S. Const. Amend. XIV, § 1, cl. 3, cl. 4.

The sum and substance of the Louisiana Supreme Court's review of Crystal Brown's federal constitutional claims has to be reviewed by this Court, in light of the federal jurisprudence, which favors individual constitutional rights and effective mechanisms through which they may be enforced. *Howlett v. Rose*, 496 U.S. 356 (1990), (Supremacy Clause requires state courts to hear federal claims based on 42 U.S.C. § 1983); *United States v. Carolene Products Co.*, 304 U.S. 144, fn. 4 (1938) (There may be narrower scope for operation of the presumption of constitutionality when legislation appears on its face to be within a specific prohibition of the Constitution, such as those of the first ten Amendments, which are deemed equally specific when held to be embraced within the Fourteenth); *Henry v. Mississippi,* 379 U.S. 443 (1965)(procedural default cannot be used to bar vindication of important federal rights); *Roe v. Wade,* 410 U.S. 113 (1973); *Brown v. Board of Education,* 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

For example, this Court in *Brown v. Bd. Of Education,* 347 U.S. 483 (1954), reversed a sixty year practice of segregated schools and overturned the long held ruling of "separate but equal." Louisiana is attempting, as Kansas, to segregate certain victims of medical malpractice. In doing so, Louisiana, like Kansas, argues that precedence requires this segregation. Louisiana must not be allowed to use the procedural requirements of *Vallo* to deprive Crystal Brown of her opportunity to raise and argue her federal constitutional rights. This Court must grant her petition for writ of certiorari and, at the very least, order the Louisiana Courts to allow Crystal Brown a hearing where she may prove the unconstitutionality of the Louisiana Revised Statute 9:5268.

CONCLUSION

The petitioners, Clarence Brown and Gail O'Conner Brown, in their own right and on behalf of their minor child, Crystal Brown, respectfully request that this Court grant their petition for certiorari for the following reasons:

1. Crystal Brown properly raised her federal constitutional claims, in her petition for certiorari to the Louisiana Supreme Court, because the procedural requirement that all constitutional issues be raised in the trial court, as applied, effectively denies Crystal Brown of any opportunity to raise her federal constitutional claims;

2. Louisiana Revised Statute 9:2568 violates not only Crystal Brown's federal rights to due process and equal protection but, also, the rights of all persons in Louisiana whose medical malpractice injuries cannot be detected within the statute's three year prescriptive period;

3. Louisiana Revised Statute 9:2568 has a disproportional impact on minors, who are disenfranchised from both the judicial and political, processes and are greatly restricted in their ability to, effectively, protect their federal constitutional rights;

4. Louisiana must not be allowed to use the procedural requirements of *Vallo* to deprive Crystal Brown of her opportunity to raise and argue her federal constitutional rights.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles O. Taylor
Counsel of Record

Entered November 6, 1998

The Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana

IN RE: MEDICAL REVIEW
PANEL FOR THE CLAIM OF
CLARENCE BROWN AND GAIL O'CONNOR BROWN

NO. 98-C - 2020

- - - - - -

IN RE: Brown, Clarence; Brown, Gail O'Connor - Plaintiff(s);
Applying for Writ of Certiorari and/or Review; to the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit, Number 97CA-2803; Parish of Orleans Civil District Court Div."G" Number 95-13006

- - - - - -

November 6, 1998

Denied.

CDK
PFC
WFM
HTL
BJJ
JPV
CDT

KNOLL, J. not on panel.

Supreme Court of Louisiana
November 6, 1998

"s/_____"
Clerk of Court
For the Court

Entered July 1, 1998

IN RE: MEDICAL REVIEW PANEL FOR THE CLAIM OF CLARENCE BROWN AND GAIL O'CONNOR BROWN	*	**NO. 97-CA-2803**
	*	**COURT OF APPEAL**
	*	**FOURTH CIRCUIT**
	*	**STATE OF LOUISIANA**

* * * * * * * *

APPEAL FROM
CIVIL DISTRICT COURT, ORLEANS PARISH
NO. 95-13006, DIVISION "G"
HONORABLE ROBIN M. GIARRUSSO, JUDGE

* * * * * *

DENIS A. BARRY
JUDGE

* * * * * *

(Court composed of Judge Denis A. Barry, Judge William H. Byrnes, III, Judge Miriam G. Waltzer)

CHARLES OWEN TAYLOR
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AFFIRMED

"s /DAB"
"s/ WHB"
"s/ MW"

Plaintiffs appeal the dismissal of their medical malpractice claim based on prescription. They argue they are entitled to a hearing on the constitutionality of the prescription statue, La. R.S. 9:5628; alternatively, prescription was interrupted or suspended based on the defendants' continuing relationship with the injured plaintiff. We affirm.

Facts

On July 12, 1985, two physicians at Charity Hospital (now the Medical Center of New Orleans) removed a mass from the right breast of seventeen month old Crystal Brown. The lesion was benign. Crystal was discharged from the pediatric

surgery clinic on August 19, 1985.

When Crystal reached puberty, her left breast developed but her right breast did not. On February 3, 1994, she and her parents were informed that the right breast would not develop because the breast tissue was surgically removed in 1985. On May 6, 1994, Crystal's parents filed a complaint of medical malpractice with the commissioner of administration against Charity and the two doctors. The complaint is not in the record. The parties do not dispute the filing date.

The defendants, represented by the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, invoked the jurisdiction of the district court and urged prescription. The Browns' opposition asserted that prescription did not commence until they knew of the damage; and prescription was interrupted or suspended because the defendants had a continuing professional relationship with Crystal. In a supplemental memorandum in opposition to the exception, the Browns alleged that the prescription statute is unconstitutional. The trial court granted the exception and dismissed the suit with prejudice.

Prescription

A malpractice claim prescribes one year from the alleged act, omission, or neglect, or one year from discovery of the alleged act, omission, or neglect. La. R.S. 9:5628. However, no claim may be filed after three years of the alleged act, omission, or neglect.

> (E)ven as to claims filed within one year from the date of such discovery, in all events such claims shall be filed at the latest within a period of three years from the date of the alleged act, omission, or neglect.

La. R.S. 9:5628A.

Thus §5628 abrogates in malpractice cases the "discovery" rule, the fourth category of the judicially created doctrine of *contra non valentem*. Boudoin v. Nicholson, Baehr, Calhoun & Lanasa, 96-0363, p. 7 (La. App. 4 Cir. 7/30/97), 698 So. 2d 469, 473.

The Browns did not commence their malpractice claim within three years from the 1985 surgical removal of the breast. Their claim prescribed under La. R.S. 9:5628.

Continual Treatment

The Browns argue prescription was interrupted due to Crystal's continual treatment by defendants. Because the

Browns assert interruption or suspension, they have the burden of proving that prescription was interrupted or suspended. Tullier v. St. Frances Cabrini Hospital, 96-738, p. 3 (La. App. 3 Cir. 2/5/97), 689 So. 2d 529, 530, writ den. 97-1233 (La. 9/5/97), 700 So. 2d 508.

Interruption of prescription by a doctor's continued professional relationship with the patient is not based on continuous treatment constituting a continuing tort. Rather, it is based on the premise that the professional relationship will likely hinder the patient's inclination to sue. Abrams v. Herbert, 590 So. 2d 1291, 1295 (La. App. 1st Cir. 1991).

The record contains no evidence of a continuous relationship between Crystal and the defendants. Medical records submitted by the Browns show that Crystal was an inpatient for the 1985 surgery and that she returned to Charity in 1993 and 1994. There is no basis to hold that prescription was interrupted by a continuing professional relationship.

In their reply brief, the Browns' argue that "the continuing tort of failure to inform existed."

Under the continuous tort doctrine, prescription does not commence until the tortious conduct is abated. Romaguera v.

Overby, 97-1654, p. 3 (La. App. 4 Cir. 3/4/98), - - - So. 2d - - - . To allege a continuing tort, a plaintiff must allege continuous action and continuous damage. Id. The defendants' alleged malpractice occurred when the breast tissue was removed in 1985. There was no continuous act that perpetuated Crystal's injury.

This case is distinguishable from Winder v. Avet, 613 So. 2d 1992 (La. App. 1st Cir. 1992), writs den. 617 So. 2d 907 (La. 1993), cited by the Browns. In Winder the defendant doctor misdiagnosed the patient's condition as cancer. Following the misdiagnosis the patient and defendant were in continual contact, and the patient was continuously treated for cancer that he did not have. He died of complications from the treatment.

The Browns also rely upon Justice Lemmon's dissent in Whitnell v. Silverman, 95-0112, 95-0259 (La. 12/6/96), 686 So. 2d 23, 32-35, which considered application of the third category of *contra non valentem* to a malpractice case. *Contra non valentem* applies to interrupt or suspend prescription in four general situations, the third of which is:

> The debtor himself has done some act effectually to prevent the creditor from availing himself of his cause of action.

The Supreme Court has examined the application of that exception to a medical malpractice claim but has not "expressly and directly declared that the third category of *contra non valentem* applies to medical malpractice cases." Fontenot v. ABC Insurance Co., 95-1707, p. 5 (La. 6/7/96), 674 So. 2d 960, 963; Claim of Aron, 96-2665, p. 4 (La. App. 4 Cir. 5/21/97), 695, So. 2d 553, 556-557, *citing* Rajnowski v. St. Patrick's Hospital, 564 So. 2d 671 (La. 1990). However, the Supreme Court has stated that a physician's conduct must rise to the level of concealment, misrepresentation, fraud, or ill practices under that exception. Fontenot v. ABC Insurance Co., 674 So. 2d at 963; Claim of Aron, 695 So. 2d at 557.

The Browns did not allege concealment, misrepresentation, fraud, or ill practice. Even assuming the third category of *contra non valentem* may be invoked in a malpractice case, there was no allegation or showing that it applies to this case.

Constitutionality of La. R.S. 9:5628

The Browns argue they are entitled to an evidentiary hearing and ruling from the trial court on whether La. R.S. 9:5628 is unconstitutional as applied to Crystal. *See* Sibley v.

Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State University, 477 So. 2d 1094, 1109-1110 (La. 1985). They claim the statute unreasonably discriminates against Crystal on the basis of her physical condition. They submit that because Crystal could not have known of the damage before she reached puberty and her breasts developed, her condition had a latency period greater than the three year limitation of §5628. The Browns urge this Court to remand for an evidentiary hearing. Defendants respond that a remand is not warranted because the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the statute.

In Crier v. Whitecloud, 496 So. 2d 305 (La. 1986), the plaintiff's injury occurred more than three years after her medical treatment. In 1978 a rod was surgically implanted in her back to correct scoliosis. In 1982 the rod broke. The plaintiff filed suit within one year of that discovery. In response to the doctor's exception of prescription, plaintiff claimed the three year limitation in La. R.S. 9:5628 violated her rights to due process and equal protection. The Supreme Court held that § 5628 equally affects all persons who undergo medical treatment and does not discriminate against one class of individuals based on physical condition. Crier, 496 So. 2d at 311. Because the

classification of which plaintiff complained was outside the scope of La. Const. art. 1, § 3, which prohibits discrimination based on physical condition, plaintiff had to show that the statute did not further an appropriate state interest. Id. The plaintiff offered no evidence to show that R.S. 9:5628 did not further an appropriate state interest and that the statute was not rationally related to a reasonable state interest. Moreover, the Court held that a remand "would serve no useful purpose." Crier, 496 So. 2d at 311.

Three justices dissented, two because they would have remanded for a hearing. Justice Dennis would have remanded, but he agreed that La. R.S. 9:5628 did not discriminate based on physical condition:

> (T)he constitutional safeguard was designed to protect against invidious discrimination between individuals based on classifications according to the nature of their physical conditions rather than according to the temporal development of their physical damage or conditions.

Crier, 496 So. 2d at 314 (Justice Dennis dissenting).

This Court sharply criticized Crier in Whitnell v. Silverman, 93-2468, 94-0343 pp. 5-6 (La. App. 4 Cir. 11/4/94), 646 So. 2d 989. In Whitnell, the plaintiff's disease had a latency

period less than three years but plaintiffs filed suit more than three years after the alleged malpractice. This Court held La. R.S. 9:5628 "is unconstitutional both as to latency periods greater than and less than three years." Id. at 993. This Court distinguished Crier because "the evidence that was so sorely lacking in the Crier record is part of the instant record as a result of the Sibley hearing ...." Whitnell, 646 So. 2d at 994.

The Supreme Court reversed. Whitnell v. Silverman, 95-0112, 95-0259 (La. 12/6/96), 686 So. 2d 23. The Court held that the plaintiff had no standing to challenge the constitutionality of La. R.S. 9:5628 in its application to persons whose diseases had latency periods over three years and that this Court erred by deciding that issue. Whitnell, 686 So. 2d at 29. The Supreme Court further upheld the constitutionality of the statute as it applied to the plaintiff. Whitnell, 686 So. 2d at 30.

The Supreme Court in Whitnell specifically declined to address "the constitutionality of La. R.S. 9:5628 as it applies to individuals with diseases that have latency periods in excess of three years" because that issue was not before the Court. Whitnell, 686 So. 2d at 29, n. 13. That suggested the Court

might reconsider Crier were the issue before it. Reinforcing that suggestion, Justice Lemmon stated in his dissent: "A case with a lengthy latency period might call for our reexamination of the Crier decision on the constitutionality of Section 5628." Whitnell, 686 So. 2d at 33 n. 5 (Justice Lemmon dissenting). Nonetheless, Whitnell "disagree[d] with the court of appeal's finding that Crier should be overruled." Whitnell, 686 So. 2d at 28. That reaffirmed Crier.

The consequence of Crystal's surgery did not physically manifest until she reached puberty more than eight years after removal of the breast tissue. Suit was filed nearly nine years after the alleged malpractice. Crier dictates that the Browns' claim be dismissed under La. R.S. 9:5628. *See also* Martin v. Louisiana State University Medical Center - Shreveport, 28, 167 (La. App. 2 Cir. 1/22/97), 688 So. 2d 642, which dismissed a malpractice claim by a plaintiff who did not discover a damaged fallopian tube until she attempted to become pregnant six and a half years after the alleged malpractice.

We pretermit the remaining issues. The judgment is affirmed.

AFFIRMED

Entered June 23, 1997

CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS

STATE OF LOUISIANA

NO. 95-13006 **DIVISION "G"**

CLARENCE BROWN, ET AL.

VERSUS

MEDICAL CENTER OF LOUISIANA AT NEW ORLEANS, ET AL.

Filed: _____ _____

Deputy Clerk

JUDGMENT

An Exception of Prescription filed by State of Louisiana, through Medical Center of Louisiana (Charity Hospital), and Doctors A & B came for hearing on the 23rd day of May, 1997.

Appearances:

Kathleen Bilbe, Attorney for Plaintiffs, Clarence Brown and Gail O'Conner Brown;

Marilyn R. Cohen, Attorney for Defendants, State of Louisiana through Medical Center of Louisiana (Charity Hospital) and Doctors A & B.

Considering the pleadings, arguments of counsel for reasons already assigned;

IT IS ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that the Exception of Prescription filed by defendants be, and the same is hereby granted;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that the claims and demands of plaintiffs, Clarence Brown and Gail O'Conner Brown on behalf of their minor child, Crystal Brown, are hereby dismissed with prejudice, each party to bear its costs.

New Orleans, Louisiana, this 20th day of June, 1997.

"s/ Robin M. Giarrusso"
JUDGE
DIVISION "G"

RECEIVED
JUN 23 1997
ENTERED ON MINUTES

Respectfully submitted,

RICHARD P. IEYOUB
ATTORNEY GENERAL

CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS
UNION JUSTICE CONFIDENCE
STATE OF LOUISIANA
A TRUE COPY
"s/ _____ "
Deputy Clerk, Civil District Court

Parish of Orleans
State of LA

"s /_____"
VERIFIED

By:"s/ Marilyn R. Cohen"
MARILYN R. COHEN (BAR NO. 4235)
Assistant General Attorney
LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT
OF JUSTICE
601 POYDRAS STREET, SUITE 1725
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70130
(504) 599-1200

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a copy of the above and foregoing has been forwarded to all counsel of record, by placing a copy of same in the U.S. mail, postage prepaid, this 19th day of June, 1997.

"s/ Marilyn R. Cohen"
Marilyn R. Cohen

SUPREME COURT
FOR THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

No.

"s/ CA"
SUPREME COURT
OF LOUISIANA
Jul 28 10 04 AM '98
"s/ _____"
CLERK
OF COURT

IN RE:
MEDICAL REVIEW PANEL
FOR
CLAIM OF
CLARENCE BROWN
AND
GAIL O'CONNOR BROWN
Plaintiffs-Applicants

Petition for Writ of Review
From the Judgments of the
Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans
Number 95-13006
Hon. Robin Giarrusso, District Judge
and
of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal

PETITION FOR WRIT OF *CERTIORARI*
or
REVIEW

Carter & Taylor
By: "s/ Charles O. Taylor"
Charles Owen Taylor (Bar No. 19869)
C. Scott Carter (Bar No. 3922)
Heritage Plaza - Suite 900
111 Veterans Boulevard
Metairie, LA 70005
Telephone: (504) 834-7300
Attorneys for Clarence and Gail O'Connor Brown, Plaintiffs - Applicants

INDEX

To the Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana:

The petition of Clarence and Gail O'Connor Brown, plaintiffs/applicants in the cause entitled *In Re: Medical Review Panel for the Claim of Clarence Brown and Gail O'Connor Brown*, lately pending in the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit, on an appeal from a judgment of the Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, with respect represents:

JURISDICTION OF THE COURT

This Honorable Court has jurisdiction pursuant to Article 5, Section 5 of the Louisiana Constitution.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Crystal Brown was born on January 2nd, 1984. On or about July 10th, 1985 she was malpracticed upon by physicians employed or controlled by the State of Louisiana when they performed a "breast biopsy" which removed all of the breast tissue in her right breast.

This was undiscoverable by Crystal, or her parents, until years later when she reached puberty. When her breasts did not develop equally, she saw a physician at Charity Hospital's Clinic. On **February 3rd, 1994**, Crystal and her parents were told that Crystal would have no breast development because of the surgical removal of her right breast tissue.

Pursuant to *LSA-R.S. 40:1299.39, et seq.*, Crystal's parents filed a Complaint with the Division of Administration on May 6th, 1994. The State of Louisiana does not dispute that the Complaint was filed within one year of the discovery of the malpractice.

The State of Louisiana filed an Exception of Prescription on April 4th, 1996. The State presented no evidence to rebut "continuous treatment" of Crystal. The trial court dismissed the case *without ordering a Sibley hearing* on June 20th, 1997.

Crystal's appeal was timely filed on the issues of her right to a *Sibley* hearing relative to the constitutionality of *LSA-R.S. 9:5628* or the interruption of prescription due to continuous treatment. Crystal and her parents allege the statute discriminates against her on the basis of her physical condition **that could not be discovered for well over three years**, *i.e.*, until she reached puberty.

Thus, after a hearing where no evidence was introduced, the State of Louisiana's Exception of Prescription was granted by the trial court. The ruling of the trial court was sustained by the Court of Appeal.

THE ISSUES

The issues squarely presented by Crystal Brown's Appeal are:

(1) Did the Trial Court and Fourth Circuit err when they denied Crystal a *Sibley* Hearing, i.e., even if Crystal Brown is not in a

suspect classification, is she not entitled to a *Sibley* Hearing?

(2) According to the law and jurisprudence, when a person is discriminated against on the basis of their physical condition, they are clearly entitled to a *Sibley* hearing where the proponent of the offending legislation must show the legislation reasonably furthers a legitimate purpose. To hold otherwise under the facts of this case is to deprive Crystal Brown and her parents of any opportunity to seek redress for the terrible wrong done to her. A wrong neither she nor her parents caused. A wrong neither she nor her parents could have reasonably or timely discovered until she began to develop, and a wrong that directly and painfully discriminates against her based upon her physical condition and her sex. **Thus, as positioned by the Fourth Circuit's Opinion, is Crystal discriminated against on the basis of her physical condition or sex?**

(3) Also, has Crystal Brown adequately plead the constitutional issues so that this Honorable Court may grant her request?

(4) Did Crystal Brown adequately plead continuing treatment so that her Complaint should not be dismissed?

(5) In addition to the direct "latency" argument presented, *supra*., the third category of the doctrine of *contra non valentem*

should apply where, as here, physicians have actual material information but fail to disclose the information for reasons short of intentional concealment.

(6) Finally, under the facts and circumstances presented by Crystal Brown and pursuant to the Fourth Circuit's denial of her appeal, this Court should overrule the case of *Crier v. Whitecloud*, 496 So.2d 305 (La. 1986).

QUESTIONS OF LAW PRESENTED

The first question of law before this Honorable Court revolves around the trial court and Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal's refusal to grant Crystal Brown a *Sibley* hearing to prove that LSA R.S. 9:5628 is unconstitutional. *Sibley v. Board of Supervisors of L.S.U.*, 477 So.2d 1094 (La. 1985).

The second question of law presented to this Honorable Court is whether Crystal Brown is unfairly discriminated against in violation of the Louisiana Constitution, *Article 1, Section 3*, on the basis of her physical condition which was undiscoverable by her and her parents until years after the malpractice and years after prescription had tolled under LSA-R.S. 9:5628 and/or discriminated against because of her sex in

that the injuries she suffered could not have been suffered by anyone but a woman and the results thus far wholly discriminate against women.

Another question of law which must be addressed by this Court is whether Crystal Brown adequately pled the unconstitutionality of the statute as she was constrained **by law** from filing a Petition for Damages, but is adversely and prejudicially denied an opportunity to prove her allegations in a court if the Fourth Circuit's ruling is allowed to stand?

Another issue Crystal Brown's case presents for this Court's review is whether, based upon the record in this matter, *continuous treatment was pled*? Since only the State of Louisiana treated Crystal, that treatment is continuous and, therefore, her case is not prescribed. This allegation has not been disproved by the State.

Was prescription interrupted or suspended by the third category of *contra non valentem*, where, as here, physicians have actual material information but fail to disclose the information for reasons short of intentional concealment?

The final question of law presented to this Honorable Court by the pleadings of the parties and the circumstances of

the trial court's action and the Court of Appeal's decision involves whether the case of *Crier v. Whitecloud, supra.*, **a case decided on no record of evidence**, upon a Summary Judgment, where the issue of constitutionality came before this Court very much as Crystal's does now, should be overruled as it patently, harshly and unfairly discriminates against women and others with latent diseases which cannot be discovered within three years.

Accordingly, the decision of the Court of Appeal, and the trial court which used *Crier v. Whitecloud, supra.*, as a basis should be reversed and this Court should overrule *Crier v. Whitecloud, supra.*

ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

The Honorable Trial Court and Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal erred when they failed to order a *Sibley* hearing assigning to the State the burden of showing that LSA-R.S. 9:5628 is not arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable or reasonably furthers a legitimate purpose once the constitutionality of the statute was challenged. Crystal Brown is unfairly discriminated

against in violation of the Louisiana Constitution, Art. 1, Section 3 and the United States Constitution on the basis of her physical condition and sex, which discrimination was undiscoverable by her until years after the malpractice and years after prescription had tolled under LSA-R.S. 9:5628.

The Honorable Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal and the trial court erred when they failed to hold that Crystal Brown had been continuously treated by the defendant and was entitled to the "continuous treatment" exception to LSA-R.S. 9:5628.

The Courts below also erred by failing to allow Crystal an opportunity to show the statute's constitutional deficiencies, by failing to hold she had preserved her constitutional argument [while holding against her on the constitutional issue], and failing to even consider the informed consent issue [*contra non valentem*].

Finally, it is time for this Honorable Court to review the facts and circumstances of this particular case with its unjust result and overturn its prior decision in *Crier v. Whitecloud, supra.*, and hold that in cases where the disease or harm is undiscoverable within three years, that LSA-R.S. 5628 is unconstitutional.

ARGUMENT ON ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

Petitioner attaches hereto and makes a part of this application the following documents:

1. A legible copy of the pleadings filed in the Court of Original Jurisdiction.
2. A legible copy of a judgment of the Court of Original Jurisdiction and the written reasons therefore.
3. A legible copy of the Opinion rendered by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal.
4. Legible copies of all briefs that were filed in the Court of Appeal.

FACTS & ARGUMENT

Crystal Brown was born on **January 2d, 1984**. Her prenatal history, birth and development until June of 1985 was significant only for the usual childhood diseases, asthma and a dog bite.

On June 24th, 1985, when she was 17 months old, she presented to the Pediatric Clinic of Charity Hospital of New Orleans with a complaint that one of her breasts was swollen. This was the second time in two weeks that Crystal had this

complaint as the previous therapy of warm compresses had not helped the problem.

Her treatment continued at Charity until finally, on **July 12th, 1985**, Crystal's right breast was biopsied and **all of her breast tissue was removed**. She had a benign condition of the breast. So, instead of running the usual endocrine tests, consulting an endocrinologist, or just plain waiting, the physicians at Charity went straight to a surgical procedure and removed all of Crystal's breast tissue. The Consent Form signed by Crystal's mother does not come even close to mentioning that a failure to develop may happen as a result of the "biopsy" or removal of the "mass." *Applicant's Exhibit A.*

In **January of 1993** Crystal began exhibiting symptoms of sexual precocity and, finally, on **February 3rd, 1994** she was diagnosed and told that she had no development of the right breast because of the earlier operation.

[Figs. 1 & 2] Figures Omitted

Crystal's complaint was filed with the Commissioner of Administration three months later on **May 6th, 1994**. It is

undisputed that, upon this record, Crystal has been continuously treated by the State from the time of her birth to the present.

The State of Louisiana filed an Exception of Prescription on **April 4th, 1996.** The trial court dismissed the case *without ordering a Sibley hearing* on June **20th, 1997.**

Crier redux

This case is before this Honorable Court because neither Crystal Brown, nor her parents, have had the opportunity to file any Petitions[1], take any testimony, offer any evidence, or have the merits of her claim adjudicated in any way. Thus, as in the case of *Crier v. Whitecloud,* 496 So.2d 305 (La. 1986), this ill conceived and discriminatory law may be, again, poised to be affirmed **without any substantive scrutiny**. See Judge Waltzer's excellent discussion of *Crier* in *Whitnell v. Silverman*, 93-0343, 646 So.2d 989, 993 (La. App., 4th Cir., 1994) rev'd other grounds, 95-0259, 686 So.2d 13 (La. 1996).

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[1] *LSA-R.S. 40:1299.39.1(B)(1)(a)(1) et seq.* makes it **premature** for a plaintiff to file a Petition for Damages before a claim is heard by a Medical Review Panel, **BUT** the State may file any exceptions it may have before the Panel meets. *Id. at (B)(2)(a).*

This Court clearly commands that a person who is discriminated against on the basis of their physical condition is entitled to a *Sibley* hearing where the proponent of the offending legislation must show the legislation reasonably furthers a legitimate purpose. *Sibley v. Bd. Of Suprs Of L.S.U.*, 477 So.2d 1094 (La. 1985). Accord, *Whitnell v. Silverman*, 686 So.2d 23 (La. 1996) and *Whitnell v. Silverman*, 598 So.2d 345 (La. 1992), where this Court specifically ordered the case back for a *Sibley* hearing. *Article I § 3* of our Constitution simply leaves this Court no other alternative. Simple justice leaves this Court no other alternative.

This law, *LSA-R.S. 9:5628*, conceived without benefit of fact or logic, not only discriminates against Crystal Brown on the basis of her physical condition, but also denies her access to the courts and equal protection of the laws. This Court recognized that this could happen and, under our broader Constitutional protections, twice commanded hearings in *Sibley*. *Id* at 1107, 1108.

The facile and imprecise argument used in *Whitnell VIII* to distinguish between either the difference between *Sibley* and *Whitnell* (damage cap *viz.* Statute of prescription) must yield to

more precise constitutional and commonsense analysis.

Justice Marcus' pronouncement in *Crier*, unsupported by jurisprudence and revealed, by the evidence in *Whitnell,* to be unsupported in fact, that the statute "...affects equally all persons who undergo medical treatment."(@ 311) is wholly and completely disputed by the facts of this case.[2]

With all due respect, Crystal Brown also asks you to hold that *Crier v. Whitecloud* is wrong and overrule it as it applies to deny Crystal Brown a right of action. With all due respect, this Court was wrong in *Whitnell VIII* (686 So.2d 23) when it said that *9:5628* treats every one who seeks medical treatment the same and, thus, does not offend concepts of equal protection. Obviously, Crystal Brown was not treated like everyone else when **eight years after her original harm she was blind-sided with the fact that she was injured without any opportunity to discover the wrong done to her**! How was Crystal Brown to discover that all of her breast tissue had been removed? How is

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[2] Of course, AIDS and Hepatitis cases also squarely dispute *Crier* and are before this Court. Crystal's plight is different in that surgery, not latent disease, created her condition.

her condition treated "equally" with that of someone who has continued pain, or misses a body part or dies? How can this travesty be reconciled with any concept of fair play, justice, or equality?

This harsh result **is constitutionally infirm.** Not only have at least six other state Supreme Courts declared as much in similar situations, but commentators have also recognized the constitutional infirmities as well as the fact that statutes of limitations do not have the impact upon the so called medical malpractice crisis legislators were led to believe such statutes would have. *Sax v. Votteley*, 648 S. W. 2d 661 (Tex 1983) *due process, Strahler v. St. Luke's Hospital,* 706 S. W. 2d (Mo. 1986) *due process*, *Carson v. Maurer,* 424 A. 2d 825 (N.H. 1980) *equal protection*, *Mominee v. Scherbarth,* 503 N.E. 2d 717 (Ohio 1986) *due process, Barrio v. San Mamuel Division Hospital* 692 P. 2d 280 (Arizona 1984), Andrews, *Infant Tolling Statutes in Medical Malpractice Cases: State Constitutional Challenges,* 5 J. Legal Med 469 (1984), Sloan, *Effects of Tort Reforms on the Value of Closed Medical Malpractice Claims: A Microanalysis,* 14(4) Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law 683 (1989), Wagner, *Impact of Legal*

Reforms on Medical Malpractice Costs O T A, September 1993. See also Justice Dennis' dissent in *Crier* at 314.

Crystal Brown's plight also raises the spectre of blatant and unconstitutional sex discrimination. Only women with this type of maiming surgery are effected...men cannot be. Thus, Crystal's operation, perforce, places her within a suspect classification, to wit, sex (*i.e.* female).

Crystal Brown places her case before this tribunal and asks for its justice, its compassion and its wisdom.

Is the Constitutional Issue Properly Raised?

An important, albeit ancillary question, is raised by this appeal to you, the highest court in the state. That is: Has Crystal Brown adequately raised the constitutional issue before the Trial Court?

Crystal Brown urges this Honorable Court to answer that question affirmatively.

While a cursory reading of *Vallo v. Gayle Oil Co., Inc.*, 646 So.2d 859 (La. 1994) and *Williams v. State Dept. of Health & Hospitals*, 671 So.2d 899 (La 1996) might lead one to the opposite conclusion, an in depth analysis of these two cases yields sweeter fruit.

First and most importantly, Crystal Brown **is not asking this Honorable Court to rule on the constitutionality of *LSA-R.S. 9:5628* at this time...she merely prays for a *Sibley* hearing.** When this Court orders that hearing, all of the opportunity to be heard at a full contradictory hearing with evidence and testimony is afforded the State [and Crystal] as the State shoulders its burden of proving this illogical and misguided law is somehow rationally related to a legitimate state purpose.

Second, at this point, this matter comes before this Honorable Court in the only way it could have. The State Medical Malpractice Act mandates, unfairly, that a review panel must first be held after a Complaint is filed with the Commissioner of Administration. Any other action would have been premature, or placed counsel in the tenuous position of undertaking sanctionable actions, or having Crystal Brown's plight adjudged as one without standing. The cock-eyed drafting and unfairness of the Medical Malpractice Act is apparent at every turn. How was Crystal to allege the unconstitutionality of the prescription statute? She was precluded from filing a Petition for Damages asserting that *LSA-R.S.*

9:5628 was unconstitutional until after the Medical Review Panel was concluded.

This Court is well aware of the rationale of *Vallo*. The state must have notice and a fair opportunity to be heard on issues of constitutionality. Here, Crystal Brown urges you to see the State is more than adequately protected by Crystal's request.

Finally, there remains one overriding and compelling reason why this Court should allow Crystal Brown an opportunity for a *Sibley* hearing. **It is the right thing to do.**

It is easy to understand why the State does not want you to rule in Crystal's favor. It has already litigated the issues and lost. It is, by virtue of the last ruling on the issue, which, in fact, avoided discussion of the constitutionality issue, allowed to cling to a deficient ruling arrived at on a less than perfect record.

Ironically, the State is charged with protecting children...yet here it seeks to protect itself from its own wrong doing against a child. **Is this right? Is this just?**

Crystal Brown is entitled to a Sibley Hearing regardless of *Crier.*

Even if Crystal Brown is not an *Article I, Sec. 3* plaintiff, she is entitled under *Sibley* to a hearing, where she has the burden of proof, to prove there was no rational reason, no compelling reason, no logical reason for this terrible law's existence.

Crystal Brown asks this Court allow her to replicate and strengthen the proofs necessary to convince all rational men that there existed no reason to change Louisiana's tort scheme in 1975 and that the legislature's supposed goal of insuring the availability of medical care by insuring affordable and available medical malpractice insurance was foisted upon it by a huge media campaign financed by the insurance industry and manned by the state medical society. Unfortunately, it was not based upon any evidence and, in fact and as revealed in *Whitnell*, conditions in Louisiana during this period were calm and under control!

This Honorable Court must grant Crystal her *Sibley* hearing or her rights, and the rights of countless others, will be rendered meaningless.

Continuous Treatment

As the State presented no evidence to rebut the allegation that Crystal was continuously treated by the State, it was error for the Trial Judge to dismiss her Complaint, with prejudice, and, upon these facts, inexplicable for the Honorable Fourth Circuit to uphold this erroneous ruling. It is a well accepted exception to prescription that continuous treatment creates a continuum wherein the health care provider's fiduciary duty to reveal facts is uninterrupted. *Trainor v. Young*, 561 So.2d 722 (La. App, 2nd Cir. 1990), *writ den.*, 5567 So.2nd 1124, 1125 (La. 1990). See, also, Justice Lemmon's scholarly dissent in *Whitnell VIII at page 32, Winder v. Avet,* 613 So.2nd 199 (La. App. 1st Cir. 1992), *Adams v. Hebert*, 590 So.2d 1291 (La. App. 1st Cir. 1991).

The clear import of these cases and the continuous treatment exception is that where, as here, the patient's inclination to sue is hindered by a continuing professional relationship, as is the professional's inclination to divulge the whole truth [short of fraud], prescription is either interrupted or never commences. As the Court stated in *Adams, supra at 1294*:

> So long as a defendant with a duty to disclose posses knowledge and yet fails to act, the tort is a continuing one which renews itself from day to day.

Remember, not only was continuing treatment never rebutted by the State, but in an irony of ironies, the State, because of Crystal's poverty, will have to repair their damage anyway. On the facts before it, the Honorable Trial Judge erred in dismissing the Complaint.

Contra Non Valentem

Justice Lemmon, dissenting in *Whitnell VIII*, clearly and cogently articulated a commonsense analysis of cases such as Crystal's. In recognizing the application of the third category of *contra non valentem* (where debtor does something *short of fraud* to prohibit action), Justice Lemmon offered constitutional peace to a beleaguered statute, allowing plaintiffs, such as Crystal, to prove their cases while, *in keeping with the precepts of civilian jurisprudence*, making imminent commonsense in the health care environment.

Where, as here, physicians have special knowledge and do not share it with their patients, the doctrine should operate to save the case from prescription without the hapless patient

trying to prove bad motive on the part of the physician for failing to reveal the needed information. This fiduciary relationship springs from the very physician-patient relationship physicians seek to hold so inviolate. Justice Lemmon's analysis offers a normative view of what transpires in medical negligence cases like this one. Physicians had the material information that removal of the breast tissue would mean **no breast development** and physicians knew there were other, less drastic measures to pursue. They were obligated to divulge this information but did not [see consent sheet]. Requiring patients to prove fraud or ill motive is not only impossible, but not relevant. The key point Justice Lemmon urges upon us is that the failure of a fiduciary to reveal that which he should is the heart of the third category of *contra non* as it should be applied to health care cases. *Id.* @ 34.

CONCLUSION

Crystal Brown's Complaint of medical malpractice should be reinstated and the Trial Court's ruling must be reversed.

Crystal Brown argues there are three reasons why this Court should reverse the Trial Court and the Fourth Circuit that do not require a constitutional holding at present.

Crystal Brown has shown this Honorable Court that she is either entitled to an opportunity to rebut the State's case at a *Sibley* hearing because she is clearly discriminated against by virtue of her physical condition or she is entitled to have the Trial Court's judgment reversed because the State did not place one iota of evidence into the record to rebut Crystal's assertion of continuous treatment. Finally, Crystal adopts for her case and urges this Honorable Court to hold that Justice Lemmon's arguments regarding the third category of *contra non valentem* mandate a finding that prescription was interrupted in this case.

Failing these, Crystal urges this Honorable Court reevaluate its holding in *Crier v. Whitecloud* upon the facts and circumstances of **her case** and overturn *Crier* as it applies to Crystal to prohibit her suit.

To dismiss this child's Complaint is plainly and palpably wrong. It is unjust. It is injurious to the public weal. This court is authorized to, "...render any judgment which is **just**, legal, and proper upon the record..." *La. C.C.P. Art. 2164.* Crystal Brown

and her parents pray that this Court do what is right and just in this case and reverse the holdings of the lower Courts.

Respectfully Submitted:

CARTER & TAYLOR

"s/ Charles O. Taylor"
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VERIFICATION

STATE OF LOUISIANA
PARISH OF JEFFERSON

BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority, personally came and appeared, Charles O. Taylor, who being first sworn, did depose and say:

That he is the attorney for Clarence and Gail O'Connor Brown, plaintiffs in the above entitled and numbered cause, and petitioners in this Application for A Writ of Certiorari or Review;

That he has prepared and read the said application and that all of the allegations contained therein are true and correct;

That copies of this petition were mailed to:

Hon. Danielle Schott
Clerk
Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal
Seventh Floor
1515 Poydras Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Hon. Robin Giarrusso
Civil District Court
Parish of Orleans
421 Loyola Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70112

J. Elliot Baker, Esq.
DOJ
New Orleans Regional Office
601 Poydras Street, Suite 1725
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postage prepaid, on the 28th day of July, 1998.

"s/ Charles O. Taylor"
Charles O. Taylor

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED
BEFORE ME THIS 28th DAY OF
JULY, 1998

"s/ Adrienne LaCour"
NOTARY PUBLIC